USDA United States Department of Agriculture | Forest Service | Shasta-Trinity National Forest
Trinity River Management Unit
Weaverville Ranger Station

P.O. Box 1190
Weaverville, CA 96093
530-623-2121
TDD: 530-623-2124

File Code: 1900
Date: August 30, 2018

Dear Interested Party,

The Shasta-Trinity National Forest, Trinity River Management Unit (TRMU), is proposing to reduce hazardous fuels on approximately 51 acres of National Forest System Land (NFS). The Musser Homestead Fuels Reduction Project (project) is located at Township 34N, Range 9W, Sections 29 & 32 Mount Diablo Meridian. The project area lies to the east of East Weaver Creek Road, and west of Forest Road 34N95, approximately one mile north of Weaverville, California (see attached map).

The Musser Hill Trail, which runs through the project area, was rerouted due to erosion in 2017. Subsequent hazard tree falling has left a high load of dead and down material, both natural and activity created, in excess of 35 tons/acre within the project area. There is also a high concentration of ladder fuels[1] within the project area, which can result in high intensity wildfire (measure by flame lengths). Surrounding NFS lands adjacent to the project area have already had fuel reduction treatments completed, and this project would complement those and create an area that increases suppression capability and protects infrastructure within the Wildland Urban Interface[2], as well as reducing the potential for fire to escape private lands onto NFS lands.

The vegetation in the area can generally be characterized as Klamath mixed conifer with a hardwood component. Major tree species consist of black, white, and canyon live oaks, ponderosa pine, and Douglas-fir, and has been subjected to native conifer encroachment as a direct result of fire exclusion. Thickets of Douglas-fir and incense cedar growing in the understory have changed stand structure and species composition. The densification of trees is resulting in accelerated mortality of larger, more fire resistant conifers such as ponderosa pine, which is characteristically dominant in this area. Dense trees and continuous fuel loadings will continue to alter the potential fire behavior on this landscape, complicating future management efforts.

We are preparing to conduct a National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) analysis for this project. This letter includes descriptions of the purpose and need, proposed action, decision to be made, and information on how to participate in this process. If no extraordinary circumstances related to the proposed action exist, then the proposed action may be categorically excluded from further analysis and documentation in a categorical exclusion (CE) under the National Environmental Policy Act. The proposed action falls under category: 36 CFR 220.6(e)(6) "Timber stand and/or wildlife habitat improvement activities that do not include the use of herbicides or do not require more than 1 mile of low standard road construction."

[1] Vegetation that supports a surface fire moving into the crowns of larger trees.
[2] The line, area, or zone where structures and other human development meet or intermingle with undeveloped wildland or vegetative fuels.

Your Involvement

You are invited to participate in the analysis for this project by providing specific written comments to us during this public scoping period. If you have information you feel that we may not be aware of or feel there are extraordinary circumstances regarding the proposed action, please send that information to the District Ranger, Joe Smailes in writing using one of the submittal methods listed here:

- Comments in electronic format including attachments may be sent to the following email address: comments-pacificsouthwest-shasta-trinity-bigbar-weaverville@fs.fed.us.
- Postal Mail – Send letters to Musser Homestead Fuels Project, Attn: Stephanie Riess, Weaverville Ranger District, P.O. Box 1190, Weaverville, CA, 96093
- In Person – Weaverville Ranger District, 360 Main Street, Weaverville, CA, 96093

Please specify the Musser Homestead Fuels Reduction Project in your comments. Although comments are welcome throughout the process, please provide your comments by close of business on October 1, 2018 to allow us to consider your input during the analysis. Comments should be as specific as possible. Please be aware that the comments received, including names and addresses of those who comment, will be part of the public record for this proposed action. Comments submitted anonymously will be accepted and considered; however, anonymous comments will not provide the agency with the ability to provide the respondent with subsequent environmental documents.

Purpose and Need for Action

There is a need to reduce surface and ladder fuels that lend to high intensity fire (measured by flame lengths and crown fire potential) within the project area. Proposed actions would reduce potential fire behavior in the project area resulting in lower flame lengths (averaging 4 feet or less), and reduced crown fire potential during 90th percentile weather conditions. There is also a need to improve the residual vegetation's growth and vigor by reducing competition within the stand. By implementing this project vegetative competition would be reduced thus allowing remaining trees to grow faster and accelerating the development of more fire-resistant boles and crowns. Leave trees would be healthier since sunlight, water, and nutrients would be more available, especially during drought conditions.

- Provide for firefighter and public safety,
- Mitigate risk to communities and infrastructure,
- Increase fire suppression capabilities,
- Improve vegetation resilience

Proposed Action

Treatments include manually thinning conifers, hardwoods, and brush, and pruning leave trees. Activity created and existing surface fuels will be removed through either chipping or prescribed burning or a combination of the two.

- Cut conifers up to 10 inches dbh on a 20 to 30 foot spacing.

- Cut brush and small diameter trees from underneath the drip line of all leave trees.
- Thin hardwoods up to 3-inches dbh on a 15 to 20 foot spacing favoring black oaks.
- Prune conifers and hardwoods up to seven feet high leaving at least 50 percent tree crown.
- Limb and top felled tree boles. Buck into six to eight foot lengths and leave on the ground for permitted firewood collection where slope and access make it feasible.
- Fell hazard trees that pose a direct threat to the Weaver Basin Trail System.
- Fell hazard trees that have the potential to strike private property.
- Hand pile activity slash and natural surface fuels to a pile size of approximately five feet in diameter and five feet high, and covered with appropriate slash cover material to keep piles dry.
- Hand piles will be placed intermittently throughout the planning area within openings and away from leave trees.
- Hand piles will be burned in the fall, winter, and spring months outside of limited operating periods (if applicable).
- Where desired and possible, activity-slash and natural surface fuels may be chipped. Any chip piles will be dispersed to a depth no greater than 3 inches.
- Repeated maintenance understory burning would occur on an interval that is conductive to a low-intensity/severity fire, similar to the pre-settlement fire regime[3].

Decision to Be Made

The decision will be to implement the proposed action, implement an alternative action that meets the purpose and need, or take no action. Information regarding this proposal may be found here: https://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=54335.

If you have any questions about this proposal or need additional information, please contact Tim Ritchey, Fuels Officer, at the address and phone above or email at: timritchey@fs.fed.us

We appreciate your interest in the management of our public lands and look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

/S/JOE D. SMAILES
District Ranger

[3] The pre-settlement fire regime occurred prior to the fire suppression era which took effect sometime after the Forest Reserve system was established in 1905. (Sugihara Neil G., Jan W. Van Wagtendonk, Kevin E. Shaffer, Joann Fites-Kaufman, Thode, Andrea E., 2006. Fire in California's Ecosystems. University of California Press, Berkeley, and Los Angeles, California)